

*Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit  
Mary, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.*

**Vancouver Christ the King Monastery**

**Lecture 3: Wednesday, January 4 afternoon**

**Man and Woman in Modern, Enlightenment and Other so-called Humanisms**

This lecture on Modern Philosophy will go back and forth among contributions from European rationalism, British empiricism, Kantian precritical and critical philosophy, to early post-modernism. It will consider the consequences of a rejection of form on the identity of a woman or a man and the shift into a fractional complementarity with a hidden polarity which views a man and a woman as only a part of one person in which the woman has the lower value.

While it focuses on the metaphysical problems that ensue from the rejection of form, it shows the subsequent destruction of the human person.

**New Metaphysical Problems about Form Appear in Modern Philosophy**

Modern philosophy generated a whole new set of metaphysical problems for women and men's identity. Many of these problems revolved around the redefinition of, and eventual rejection of form. How can the metaphysical foundations for a woman's identity be grasped if we can not speak about the form of human nature or the composite form/matter identity of a particular woman? Msgr. Robert Sokolowski describes our difficulty this way:

**A major change occurred in Western thinking about five hundred years ago.** This change **initiated what we call the modern age.** It took place in our understanding of ethics and politics, as well as our understanding of science and nature. The basic idea that was introduced at that time was **the claim that things do not have natures or forms.** This denial of natures, definitions, and ends extended even to human beings and their communities. ... I think we all know the historical figures associated with this new beginning in human thought: Machiavelli and Hobbes in regard to ethics and politics, and Francis Bacon and Descartes in regard to science and nature. This comprehensive adjustment in human thinking got played out in later years through the other familiar thinkers in the modern age: Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche, and

others. One could also see precursors of this major change in the late middle ages, especially in William of Ockham.

... [T]his was the great reversal in which truth becomes subordinated to freedom.<sup>1</sup>

William of Ockham (c. 1280-1349), a Franciscan teacher at Oxford, is considered as the founder of 'nominalism.' He argued against Aristotelian *hylomorphism* by claiming that definitions were neither of real substances, nor of universals, but only of abstract concepts or terms in the mind. He argued that reality should be thought of as consisting of only a collection of singular concepts, and that universals are simply names or terms."<sup>2</sup> Ockham was excommunicated and his teachings prohibited and condemned, but by the 1400's Ockham's nominalism gained popularity at the University of Paris with Jean Gerson (1363-1429) its chancellor.

### ***Changing the Meaning of Form/Matter Composite in Scotism***

The alternative possibility that form alone could provide the principle of individuation (*haecceitas* or "thisness") was proposed by **John Duns Scotus (1265-1308)**.<sup>3</sup> The thought of Scotus influenced the development of many seventeenth century philosophers, especially through the Franciscan school at the University of Paris. While studying with the Jesuits at La Flèche, Descartes often visited Paris between 1630 and 1645, and in 1640 he studied the

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<sup>1</sup> Msgr. Robert Sokolowski, "The Apostolic Visitation and *Veritatis Splendor*," unpublished manuscript of lecture given in 2005 provided by the author, in section entitled 'Modernity: How did we get where we are?'; and subtitled 'The loss of form,' p. 4. I am very grateful to Rev. Francis Martin for bringing this lecture to my attention and for his suggestions for the introduction to this chapter. Bold my emphasis

<sup>2</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, *William of Ockham* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), vol 1, 13.

<sup>3</sup> See *COW II*, 159-164. Roger Ariew summarizes how Scotus differentiated himself from Thomas Aquinas on form and individuation in a section titled "What is a Scotus?" in *Descartes and the Last Scholastics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 46.

Scotistic text-book of Eustace of St. Paul, a professor at the Sorbonne, saying of his *Summa Philosophia* that “it was the best book ever written on this matter.”<sup>4</sup>

As Roger Ariew summarizes it: “The Scotist position seems to be the majority position in the seventeenth century. It entails that form is the principle of individuation. This appreciably alters what one means by form; forms are no longer necessarily specific. Thus form is on its way to becoming just the way a particular part of matter is differentiated: ultimately, structure or shape, rather than the organizing principle that makes the thing the kind of thing it is.”<sup>5</sup>

**Sr. Patricia Reif, I.H.M., (1930-2002)**, in a study of twenty seventeenth-century Latin text-books, discovered that although popular manuals purported to describe Aristotelian theory, their authors often gave seventeenth-century reinterpretations of fundamental Aristotelian principles. Reif concluded: “a close examination of the textbooks reveals a rationalistic tendency to reify the universal natures, and to make these reified universals the primary objects of scientific knowledge.”<sup>6</sup>

Patricia Reif also identified other influences on the redefinition of Aristotelian/scholastic concepts of form and of matter, namely Neoplatonism, the Cabala, and alchemy which focused on occult or hidden forces in nature. She added that “[t]he prime instance of this interplay [of sources] is the rather widespread tendency to reduce the substantial form of a natural body to a kind of agent. In other words, the inner formal nature of a material thing is regarded as an internal or emanative efficient cause acting upon the thing itself.”<sup>7</sup> Following this line of thought, the form or soul of an individual woman would act as an efficient cause on her

<sup>4</sup> Ariew, *Descartes and the Last Scholastics*, 27. Eustachius wrote a *Summa theologiae tripartita* and a *Summa philosophiae quadripartita*. See also where Ariew defends the claim that the Cistercian Father Eustachius “was structurally or fundamentally Scotist, not Thomist...”, 48 and 56.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Ariew concludes that these philosophers played an important role in “preparing the way for Descartes’s ‘revolution.’” 85.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

particular matter or body, which is separate and extended. Reif concluded: "All these instances make it easier to understand why early modern philosophers trained in this textbook tradition found the dualist perspective so congenial."<sup>8</sup>

### *Cartesian Dualism provides new foundation for unisex and fractional complementary theories*

At this point in history, we begin a new era, which is replete with errors about the human being. A philosophical cause of these errors is found in the work of Rene Descartes (1592-1650), a French Catholic who sought to defend, by natural reason and a mathematical method, the separation of the soul (mind) and body. In 1641 he published his *Meditations on First Philosophy* which had lasting effect on the concept of woman in the history of philosophy.

In his *Meditations*, after rejecting scholastic metaphysics as a ground for certainty, Descartes concluded: "I am merely a thinking thing... I am really distinct from my body."<sup>9</sup>

Instead of the soul/body dualism found in Plato, we now have a mind/body dualism. The soul is flattened out to just a rational mind, and it no longer has the dual function of Thomas' soul which acts both as form of the body and spirit. Instead, the sexless mind in Descartes just thinks and performs other intellectual operations.

In addition, in *Meditations Two* Descartes also inserted a methodical doubt about knowledge of relations among human beings as well. After stating: "I am precisely nothing but a thinking thing; that is, a mind, or intellect, or understanding, or reason..."; Descartes goes on to

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), Sixth meditation, #78.

consider how he knows others exist: "... were I perchance to look out my window and observe men crossing the square, I would ordinarily say I see the men themselves... But what do I see aside from hats and clothes, which could conceal automata (robots)? Yet I judge them to be men. Thus what I thought I had seen with my eyes, I actually grasped solely with the faculty of judgment, which is in my mind."<sup>10</sup>

In this context of Descartes' struggle for the principle of unity, the work of women philosophers becomes very significant because they immediately seek principles of integration. Consider the letter of Elisabeth of Bohemia to Descartes May 6/16, 1643: "... I beseech you to tell me how the soul of man (since it is but a thinking substance) can determine the spirits of the body to produce voluntary actions. For it seems every determination of movement happens from an impulsion of the thing moved, according to the manner in which it is pushed by that which moves it, or else, depends on the qualification and figure of the superficies of this latter. Contact is required for the first two conditions, and extension for the third. You entirely exclude extension from your notion of the soul, and contact seems to me incompatible with an immaterial thing. That is why I ask of you a definition of the soul more particular than in your metaphysic—that is to say, for a definition of the substance separate from its action, thought."<sup>11</sup>

In another letter of July 1, 1643 Elisabeth challenges Descartes still further to explain how the interaction of soul and body can be properly explained within his metaphysical system: "I too find that the senses show me that the soul moves the body; but they fail to teach me (any more than the understanding and the imagination) the manner in which she does it. And, in regard to that, I think there are unknown properties in the soul that might suffice to reverse what

<sup>10</sup> Descartes, *Meditations*, #27 and #32.

<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth of Bohemia, in Margaret Atherton, ed., *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period* (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1994), 11-12.

your metaphysical meditations, with such good reasons, persuaded me concerning her inextension.”<sup>12</sup> Elisabeth offers a suggestion to help Descartes solve his problem: “Although extension is not necessary to thought, yet not being contradictory to it, it will be able to belong to some other function of the soul less essential to her.”<sup>13</sup>

### *Changing the Meaning of Form and Matter in Descartes*

Descartes further transformed the meanings and uses of the metaphysical principles of matter and form: “Descartes endorsed [the] independence [of matter from form] by assigning extension to it as its principal, indeed its only essential, attribute. At the same time he intensified the transformation of form into mere shape or size, and of course he separated the mind —the only immaterial finite substance —from any but a temporary task of informing the body. Some form-matter talk lingered on, even among his followers, but, except for the persistence of a minority scholastic position, it was as good as over.”<sup>14</sup> Descartes tried to clarify his position:

I fully agree with the view of the learned Rector that those ‘harmless entitles’ called substantial forms and real qualities should not be rashly expelled from their ancient territory. Indeed, up to now we have certainly not rejected them absolutely; we merely claim that we do not need them in order to explain the causes of natural things.... Now in such matters, saying that one does not wish to make use of these entities is almost the same as saying one will not accept them.... So we will be ready enough to confess that we do we do wholly reject them....<sup>15</sup>

“It is clear that Descartes was not able to overcome the substantial dualism between mind (*res cogitans*) and body (*res extensa*) in his *Meditations*. Saying that there is unity is not the same as providing a metaphysical foundation that assures unity. In this Cartesian reformation of the

<sup>12</sup> Elisabeth in Atherton, *Women Philosophers*, *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> For an excellent analysis of this development see Ariew, *Descartes and the Last Scholastics*, 89-96, here 96.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, AT III, 500, 207.

meaning of form, and of the relation of form to body, human composite identity suffers a real fragmentation.

### ***Continued Rejection of Form in Modern Philosophy***

The early post-Cartesian Empiricists continued occasionally to use the word 'form' but emptied it of its traditional ontological meaning as that which organizes an existent to be what it is. **Francis Bacon (1564-1645)** argued in the *Novum Organum* that "Matter, rather than forms should be the object of our attention,... for forms are figments of the human mind, unless you call those laws of action forms."<sup>16</sup> **Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)** changed the meaning of a name from signifying an ontological reality to representing simply an idea in the mind. Demonstrating this rejection of realism, a section of his *De Corpore* is subtitled as follows: "Names are signs not of things, but of our cognitions."<sup>17</sup> **John Deely (1942-)** summarizes the far ranging effects of this 'cutting of the umbilical cord between the mind and reality': "Beginning with Hobbes and Descartes—Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Spinoza, Leibniz—and culminating in the synthesis by Immanuel Kant of the two principal modern currents (Rationalism and Empiricism) in his work of *Critiques*, the view was adopted that ideas as representations and the objects we directly experience are one and the same."<sup>18</sup> What this means for the concept of woman is that these modern philosophers understood 'woman', 'feminine', and 'female' as signs of the ideas in their minds only, rather than as naming what is common to real women, differentiating essential from

<sup>16</sup> Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, (Boston: Brown and Taggard, 1842), 8: li, 83.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *The Metaphysical System of Hobbes in Twelve Chapters from Elements of Philosophy Concerning Body, Human Nature, and Leviathan* (La Salle, Illinois, 1963), title of chapter II. vi, *Concerning Body*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> John Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey of Philosophy from Ancient Times to the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 501. Deely attributes an earlier statement of this position to Pedro da Fonseca (1528-1599) and Francisco Suárez (1548-1617) who had rejected Aquinas's earlier realistic position.



accidental feminine characteristics of female human beings in the world. Let us consider briefly some of the interpersonal dynamics associated with this significant change in understanding of the mind's relation to real beings in the world.

Soon, many new authors began to defend the unisex position, and most of these authors were Protestant. On the positive side, a foundation was now provided for women's access to higher education and to participation in citizenship. For example, François Poullain de la Barre (1647-1723), a Catholic priest and disciple of Descartes, who left his faith to become a Calvinist, in *The Equality of Both Sexes* gave many arguments for the physical, mental, and moral equality of men and women. He stated that since the brain and faculties were the same in women and men, and "they were equally capable of the same things".<sup>19</sup> Another positive effect of Cartesian foundation for equality was the call for women to achieve equality with men in the public political domain. For example, Marie Gouze (1748-1793), also known as Olympe de Gouges, wrote a *Declaration of Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* which begged women to create a new world order: "Women, wake up; the tocsin of reason is being heard through the whole universe; discover your rights ... Courageously oppose the force of reason to the empty pretensions of superiority; unite yourself beneath the standards of philosophy..<sup>20</sup>

On the negative side, the mind, detached from the body began to be reified, made into a thing that once again slid into a kind of devaluation of the female. This occurred in a developed **focus on fractional complementarity, which had within it a hidden polarity**. It expressed itself in various ways. Woman was thought to provide ½ of the mind's operations, and man the

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<sup>19</sup> Poullain de la Barre, *The Woman as Good as the Man: Or, the Equality of Both Sexes* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 66.

<sup>20</sup> Olympe de Gouges, "Les Droits de la Femme" in *Women in Revolutionary Paris 1789-1795: Selected Documents with Notes and Commentary*, eds. Darline Gail Levy, et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 92.



other  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{1}{3}$  with  $\frac{2}{3}$ , or some other fraction that when added up produces only one mind. In the hidden polarity, usually the lesser valued operation was identified with women and the greater valued operation with identified with man.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), described women's 'rationality' as focussing primarily on the emotions, on practical decisions in the present, and on the general categories of taste, sentiments, and the senses, while men's minds focussed on ideas and arguments, abstract judgments, and planning for the future. In *Emile* he suggests "Consult the women's opinions in bodily matters, in all that concerns the senses; consult the men in matters of morality and all that concerns the understanding."<sup>21</sup> Rousseau further elaborates his fractional complementarity: "This relation produces a moral person of which the woman is the eye and man the hand, but the two are so dependent upon one another that the man teaches the woman what to see, and she teaches him what to do."<sup>22</sup>

Mary Wollstonecraft, an Anglican, wrote a systematic critique of Rousseau entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She bitterly attacked Rousseau's fractional complementarity saying that his theory means that a woman can not educate her own children: "How indeed should she, where her husband is not always at hand to lend her his reason? — when they both together make but one moral being. A blind will, 'eyes without hands' would go a very little way...."<sup>23</sup>

Suddenly the principles of complementarity became distorted. Because of the lack of a metaphysics of *hylomorphism*, the separate integral identity of each individual man or woman, slid into a fraction of a human being. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), argued in his pre-critical

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (London and Melbourne: Dent, 1984), 306

<sup>22</sup> Rousseau, *Emile*, 340.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Norton, 1974), 89.

work *On the Beautiful and Sublime* that a woman's "philosophy is not to reason, but to sense."<sup>24</sup>

**Arthur Schopenhauer** (1788-1860) followed a similar line of thought when he stated that: "As a result of their weaker reasoning power women are as a rule far more affected by what is present, visible and immediately real than they are by abstract ideas, standing maxims, previous decisions or in general by regard for what is far off, in the past or still to come."<sup>25</sup> **Frederick Hegel** (1770-1831) argued that woman was tied to the particular and man to the universal.<sup>26</sup> **Soren Kierkegaard** (1813-1855) limited women's rational capacities when he located her within the aesthetic and religious spheres of existence, while man had the full range including the ethical sphere.<sup>27</sup> **Even Nietzsche** (1844-1900) was partially caught in this reification of the respective fractional rational identities of men and women with a hidden traditional polarity, when he when he said that women were superior by virtue of their Dionysian inheritance, but women were also locked into a slave morality.<sup>28</sup>

Blessed Cardinal Newman, in reflecting on the significance of the history of Christianity makes an observation which could be applied to the above description of what happened when

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<sup>24</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Of the Distinction of the Beautiful and Sublime in the Interrelations of the Two Sexes," in *On the Beautiful and the Sublime*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), III, 79.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Women," in *Essays and Aphorisms* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 83.

<sup>26</sup> See G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), especially sections: "the ethical world: law divine and human: man and woman;" and "ethical action: knowledge human and divine: guilt and destiny," 462-500.

<sup>27</sup> See also, Soren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 61, 88, 98, 107, 163 and 280; or *Either/Or* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), I: 386, 424, and II: 316, and 319.

<sup>28</sup> See Sister Prudence Allen, RSM, "Nietzsche's Tension About Women" in *Lonergan Review* (1993): 42-66 or an earlier version "Nietzsche's Ambivalence about Women," in *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory*, eds. Lorenn Clark and Lynda Lange (Toronto: University Press, 1979): 117-133.

Cartesianism and Protestantism joined together to offer a new understanding of woman's identity in relation to man:

History is not a creed or a catechism; it gives lessons rather than rules; still no one can mistake its general teaching in this matter, whether he accept it or stumble at it. Bold outlines and broad masses of colour rise out of the records of the past. They may be dim, they may be incomplete; but they are definite. And this one thing at least is certain; whatever history teaches, whatever it omits, whatever it exaggerates or extenuates, whatever it says and unsays, at least the Christianity of history is not Protestantism. If ever there were a safe truth, it is this.<sup>29</sup>

It seems highly probable that the rejection of metaphysics and especially the principle of *hylomorphism* by Protestant Christian philosophers had the consequence of a transcendental annulment for Protestant Christian foundations for an integral complementarity. In other words, even though Protestant Christian women tried to reintegrate the mind and body and to bring forward a kind of authentic complementarity between men and women, they always failed. It is my hypothesis that this failure was due to the loss of a hylomorphic metaphysics of the human being, which would in turn enable the true equality and worth of women and men to be grounded in their significant difference.

One area where the fractional complementarity effected the lives of women and men is in the shift in the texts for the wedding promises between husband and wife, which began with marriages of Protestants and subsequently entered the promises of Catholic marriages. Specifically, although the formula for Catholic weddings up to the Reformation was the same for women and men, the formula changed for women, who were required to promise to 'obey' their husband.

In a remarkable book written in 1914, the Anglican physician and liturgical scholar John Wickham Legg (1843-1921), provided evidence that for over 400 years in over 100 Anglican

<sup>29</sup> Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Introduction, 7.

and Roman Catholic dioceses in Europe marriage rites included either **the direct promise by a woman to obey her husband, or the advising of the wife and husband by the minister performing the marriage rite which included the wife's duty to be obedient or subservient to her husband.**<sup>30</sup> The earliest records indicate that from the 9<sup>th</sup> through 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, celebration of Roman Catholic Marriage only requested mutual consent of the man and woman. Each diocese could establish its own Rites.<sup>31</sup> In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, an exhortation to the bride by the priest or pastor began to use the Latin phrase “obedire et servire”<sup>32</sup>

### Break and Discussion

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<sup>30</sup> J. Wickham Legg, *On the Retention of the word Obey in the Marriage Service of the Book of Common Prayer*: a Liturgical Consultation, addressed to the Bishop of Oxford, and written before the first of August, 1914 (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co, 1915). The text is also available on line at <http://anglicanhistory.org/women/jwlegg1915.pdf> See also Kirsti S. Thomas “Medieval and Renaissance Marriage: Theory and Customs” for an excellent bibliography and summary, Available at <http://celyn.drizzlehosting.com/mrwp/mrwed.html> (accessed 5/7/2-13): 18pps.

<sup>31</sup> Legg, *On the Retention of the word Obey*, Two such examples of mutual consent are: Nicholas I. Roman Pontiff (858-867) and a Bishop of Salisbury, England (1217), 19.

<sup>32</sup> According to Legg, *On the Retention of the word Obey*, the Latin phrase *obedire et servire* was translated in English as ‘to be boneyre and buxsum in bedde and at borde’ until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century when the meaning of ‘buxum’ no longer implied humble obedience., 28.

### *Form and Matter in Margaret Cavendish's Neatomism*

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673), added to the critique of metaphysics by Hobbes and Gassendi her own materialist theories which suggested that matter, understood as a **materialistic atomism**, has its own source of activity. Both Hobbes and Gassendi were part of the "Cavendish Circle" or the "Newcastle Circle," a loosely associated group of philosophers who met together in Paris in the 1640's and who often exchanged manuscripts or publications of books on topics of common interest.<sup>33</sup>

Margaret Cavendish authored several books engaging with the philosophical theories of the day. In *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666) Cavendish gave directly to matter the power of animation and motion that in classical metaphysics was due to the operation of form. Criticizing Plato's philosophy of forms, she stated that natural matter is self-moving and "form and matter are but one thing."<sup>34</sup> Against Aristotle's philosophy of the unmoved mover as pure act, which moved all things by the desire for actualization as a final cause, Cavendish argued that "nature and all her parts have self-motion, therefore they stand in no need of an exterior movement...every part and particle of nature, has the principle of motion within itself, as consisting all of a composition of animate or self-moving-matter..."<sup>35</sup> Yet, as with all materialists who rejected the metaphysical principle of form, Cavendish had difficulty explaining how increasingly complex things had a unified identity and what provided the coherent inter-relations of multiple atoms or self-moving matter.

<sup>33</sup> See Lisa T. Sarasohn, *Gassendi's Ethics: Freedom in a Mechanistic Universe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 118-122; and Eileen O'Neill, ed., Introduction to Margaret Cavendish, *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), xiii.

<sup>34</sup> Cavendish, *Observations on Experimental Philosophy*, 252.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 269.

In her many intriguing descriptions of an erroneous theory of internal motion in matter, Margaret Cavendish reveals herself as a seeker of integration, by (using her words) 'fitting' and 'matching' atoms, 'joining parts together,' and 'mixing' and 'tempering' them for 'proper uses'. Stephen Clucas describes Cavendish's attempts to solve this problem.<sup>36</sup>

✓ **John Locke (1632-1704)**, a physician and not a professionally trained philosopher, had a significant effect on both British and Continental modern philosophy.<sup>37</sup> Locke described substantial forms as "gibberish, which, in the weakness of human understanding, serves so well to palliate men's ignorance, and cover their errors."<sup>38</sup> After rejecting the ontological status of forms, Locke also argued that we do not know, or grasp the forms of things in the real world, but only simple ideas in the mind.

**Charles Taylor (1931-)** identified a philosophical error in Locke's approach to the human person in *Sources of the Self*: "It is assumed that something we call consciousness or self-consciousness could be clearly distinguished from its embodiment, and the two allowed to separate and recombine in various thought experiments, that our self-awareness is somehow detachable from its embodiment. ... This perfectly detachable consciousness is an illusion, I would claim, but it is a shadow cast by the punctual self."<sup>39</sup> By the phrase "punctual self" Taylor incorporates Locke's adoption of Descartes' disengaged ego, reification of the mind, rejection of

<sup>36</sup> See Stephen Clucas, "The Atomism of the Cavendish Circle, 265, "For philosophers such as Cavendish and Hobbes, however, who chose to view physical laws as extraneous to God's creation, motion needed an immanent principle of order which could not be fulfilled in purely mechanical terms. Thus while Cavendish elects a set of 'principal motions,' which are essentially mechanical (i.e., contraction, dilation, retention, and expulsion), she also elects a 'Digestive motion' which is less a motion than an ordering principle which oversees the functioning of the other motions: 'creating motions, carrying about parts to parts, and fitting, and matching, and joyning parts together, mixing and tempering the matter for proper uses'" with note to Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London: 1655), fol. (a3), 33-34.

<sup>37</sup> Etienne Gilson and Thomas Langan, *Introduction to A History of Philosophy: Modern Philosophy Descartes to Kant* (New York: Random House, 1964), "John Locke," chapter xiii, 190-91.

<sup>38</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), Book III, chapt. x, 14, 211. My emphasis.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Taylor, "Locke's Punctual Self," in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 159-176, here 172.



all teleology and authority, and “the growing ideal of a human agent who is able to remake himself [herself] by methodical and disciplined action.”<sup>40</sup> For Locke, discussion of woman’s identity *per se* and theories of gender identity in general were pushed out of metaphysics into the social political arena.<sup>41</sup>

**Mary Astell (1666-1731)**, invoking elements of Cartesian dualism, criticized Locke’s metaphysical materialism: “Thought is not contain’d in the idea of body, the ideas of thought and extension being as different as the ideas of a triangle and a circle, and those are as little capable of the properties of each other as these are. Therefore body can’t think; and because I and all other reasonable creatures think, therefore we are something that is not body.”<sup>42</sup>

Mary Astell developed her argument against Locke even further: “Since there is no visible connexion between matter and thought, **it is impossible for matter, or any parcels of matter to think**, at least for us to suppose it contains a contradiction. So that, in fine, I utterly despair of meeting with a triangle equal to a square, and that can eat and discourse; and I find it equally impossible for body to think.”<sup>43</sup> She concludes her critique with a counter-claim: “For I do not find that the arguments of the great Mr. L.... amount to any more than that God can ... make another substance besides body, whose essential property, if not its very essence shall be thought, and can unite this thinking substance to body, which is what we call the union of soul and body.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 159. Taylor, in 543 note 16 expresses his debt to James Tully, “Governing Conduct,” in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. E. Leites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>41</sup> See Lorene M.G. Clark, “Women and John Locke; or, Who Owns the Apples in the Garden of Eden?” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 4 (December 1977):699-724.

<sup>42</sup> [Mary Astell], *The Christian Religion as Profess’d by a Daughter of the Church of England* (London: Printed by S.H. for R. Wilkin, 1705), #260, p. 250-51.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, #267, p. 259. My emphasis.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, #269, p. 261. For an excellent analysis of the relation between Locke and Astell’s philosophical arguments see Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*, 90-113.



In spite of these disagreements Astell admired Locke's philosophy for its accessibility to women: "The greatest difficulty we struggled with was the want of a good art of reasoning, which we had not, that I know of, till that defect was supply'd by the greatest master of that art M. Locke, whose essay on Human Understanding makes large amends for the want of all others in that kind."<sup>45</sup> Astell's admiration for Locke was, according to Kathleen M. Squadrito warmly returned: "Among books in Locke's personal library are *An Essay in defense of the Female Sex* (1696), *A farther essay relating to the Female Sex* (1696), and *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700).

- ✓ Mary Astell also protested the fact that in England, when a woman marries, she loses all her property which becomes her husbands. In the law together they constitute 'one person', in which the husband not only controls all the property but also is the single one who votes. Astell's
- ✓ text *Some Reflections on Marriage* (1700) reveal this same empirical turn.<sup>46</sup> The first thing that a man asks about a prospective wife are the utilitarian questions: "What will she bring? Is the first
- ✓ Enquiry: How many acres? Or how much ready Coin?"<sup>47</sup> The wife's position in marriage is likened to enforced servanthood, enslavement, natural subjection, and a state of tyrannous domination, and love is reduced to a passing feeling which leaves women desperate:

What though a Husband can't deprive a Wife of Life without being responsible to the Law, he may, however, do what is much more grievous to a generous Mind, render Life miserable, for which she has no Redress... If all men are born Free, how is it that all Women are born Slaves? As they must be, if the being subjected to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary Will of Men, be the perfect Condition of Slavery?<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> [Mary Astell], *An Essay in Defence of The Female Sex In which are inserted the characters of a pendant, a squire, a beau, a virtuoso, a poetaster, a city-critick, etc.* In a letter to a Lady. Written by a Lady (London: Printed for A. Roper and E. Wilkinson, 1696), 54.

<sup>46</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.** Mary Astell, *Some Reflections on Marriage* (London: William Parker, 1730, rpt. New York: Source Book Press, 1970), 20.

<sup>47</sup> Astell, *Some Reflections on Marriage*, appendix by Astell, 107.

### ***Berkeley and Hume 'Banish' and 'Burn' Metaphysics***

**George Berkeley (1685-1753)**, a Bishop in the Anglican Church, followed Hobbes and Locke in rejecting the metaphysical foundation for the matter/form distinction. In his Notebook A of *Philosophical Commentaries*, Berkeley wrote: "To be **eternally banishing Metaphysics** &c& recalling Men to Common Sense."<sup>48</sup> And in another entry he is even more specific: "Anima Mundi. Substantial fforms (sic.), Omniscient radical Heat. Plastic vertue. Hylarchic (sic.) principle. **All these vanish.**"<sup>49</sup> ✓

**David Hume (1711-1776)** also rejected the principle of *hylomorphism* and the form/matter distinction. In his *Treatise of Human Nature* published in 1739, Hume stated: "The opinions of the ancient philosophers, their fictions of substance and accident, and their reasonings concerning substantial forms and occult qualities, are like the spectres in the dark, and are deriv'd from principles, which, however common, are neither universal nor unavoidable in human nature."<sup>50</sup> By the time his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* was published in 1758, Hume took an even more aggressive approach against metaphysics as a whole when he suggested that if a book contained metaphysics then: "**Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.**"<sup>51</sup> ✓

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<sup>48</sup> *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, eds. A Luce and T.E. Jessop, vol. 1 (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1848), A 751, 91. My emphasis.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, A 617, 76. My emphasis.

<sup>50</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Penguin, 1985), Book I, part iv, sect. iv, 275.

<sup>51</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed., Charles W. Hendel (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957), XII, iii, 165. My emphasis. This sterile ending of Hume's philosophy is a personal disappointment because it was through the vibrant teaching in 1960-1961 of Dr. George Davies and Dr. Pall Ardal at the University of Edinburgh of Hume's two treatises that I first came to love philosophy and chose to pursue it professionally.

For Hume, not only is there no form/matter unity in the identity of a woman, there is no unity within a woman's self-consciousness of herself as a woman. She is only a bundle of different perceptions with no collective identity as a woman, and no unique identity as a particular woman. Hume's violent rejection of metaphysics was accompanied by superficial discussions of accidental characteristics of woman's identity and of gender identity.<sup>52</sup>

Consideration of woman was shifted away from the center of philosophy and moved to peripheral topics such as her delicacy, softness, chastity, and artificial virtues. Hume particularly focused on pleasure and pain as the source of all moral values. He described women as objects of pleasure. Hume also often argued both sides of a question. In the following passage from the same text, he rejects the traditional polarity position just articulated above, and instead supports a true equality between men and women: "On the other hand, it may be urged with better reason, that this sovereignty of the male is a real usurpation, and destroys that nearness of rank, not to say equality, which nature has established between the sexes. We are, by nature, their lovers, their friends, their patrons: would we willingly exchange such endearing appellations for the barbarous title of master and tyrant?"<sup>53</sup>

### ***Kant's Failed Solution to the Rejection of Form***

**Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)**, was deeply affected by Hume's arguments against the possibility of metaphysics, which he claimed "interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy quite a new direction."<sup>54</sup> Kant concluded that

<sup>52</sup> See Christine Battersby, "An Enquiry Concerning the Humean Woman," *Philosophy* 56 (1981): 303-312; and Steven Burns, "The Humean Female" dialogue with Louise Marcil Lacoste, "The Consistency of Hume's Position Concerning Women," *Dialogue*, vol. xv, no. 3 (Sept. 1976): 415-440.

<sup>53</sup> Hume, "Of Polygamy and Divorces," 188.

<sup>54</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), par. 260, p. 5.

it was **not** possible for human beings to know things as they really are in the **noumenal** world (the real world in-itself), but only to know things in the **phenomenal** world (how things appear to us). In his words: "I say that things as objects of our senses existing outside us are given, but we know nothing of what they may be in themselves, knowing only their appearances, i.e., the representations which they cause in us by affecting our senses."<sup>55</sup>

Kant, therefore, rejected the **ontological foundation** for *hylomorphism*, the form/matter composite structure of real things. In its place he posited an **epistemological notion of form** as something that the human mind brings *a priori* to experience to organize it. Therefore, in Kant's philosophy, form, which begins with the human mind, is empty of all material content. Kant's plan to save metaphysics by this critical method of a transcendental deduction of *a priori* forms of perception and of *a priori* forms of objective empirical judgments proved lethal for metaphysics in the end, not only because it separated the human person from the possibility of grasping by abstraction forms of real ontological things in the world, but it also separated the *hylomorphic* unity of things previously considered as form/matter composites.<sup>56</sup> The question we must now ask is : With this rejection of an ontological understanding of form, and its redefinition as an epistemological category for appearances only, what happened to the concept of woman in Kant's philosophy?

The early Kant often gave popular lectures in which he described how women appeared to him; and perhaps not surprisingly, we discover once again that when *hylomorphism* is rejected, the subject of woman is given very superficial consideration. In a 1764 pre-critical text, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, Kant dedicates a chapter to the subject

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 289, p. 33.

<sup>56</sup> See also, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1963), "The Ground of the Distinction of All Objects in General into Phenomena and Noumena," chapter III, 257-275.

“Of the Distinction of the Beautiful and Sublime in the Interrelations of the Two Sexes.”<sup>57</sup> Here, Kant offers an epistemological elucidation which fractionally divides woman’s and man’s ways of knowing and being:

It is not to be understood by this that woman lacks noble qualities, or that the male sex must do without beauty completely. On the contrary, one expects that a person of either sex brings both together, in such a way that all the other merits of a woman should unite solely to enhance the character of the beautiful, which is the proper reference point; and on the other, among the masculine qualities the sublime clearly stands out as the criterion of his kind. **All judgments of the two sexes must refer to these criteria**, those that praise as well as those that blame; all education and instruction must have these before its eyes, and all efforts to advance the moral perfection of the one or the other—unless one wants to disguise the charming distinction that nature has chosen to make between the two sorts of human being.<sup>58</sup>

✓ | Kant concludes with an observation that: “**Her philosophy is not to reason, but to sense.**”<sup>59</sup>

The virtue of a woman is a *beautiful* virtue. That of the male sex should be a *noble* virtue.

Women will avoid the wicked not because it is unright, but because it is ugly; and virtuous actions mean to them such as are morally beautiful. Nothing of duty, nothing of compulsion, nothing of obligation! Woman is intolerant of all commands and all morose constraint. They do something only because it pleases them, and the art consists in making only that please them which is good. **I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles**, and I hope by that not to offend, for these are also extremely rare in the male.<sup>60</sup>

The polarization of woman and man in this well-known pre-critical essay introduces the notion of **form** only in relation to a man’s response to a woman’s external shape: “... it cannot be unpleasant to bring under concepts, if possible, the difference of the impression that the form and features of the fair sex make on the masculine. This complete fascination is really overlaid upon

<sup>57</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), 76-96.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77. My emphasis.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 79. My emphasis.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

the sex instinct.”<sup>61</sup> What follows from the rejection of an ontology of form organizing matter in real things is again the view that form is really only something related to a man’s response to the external three dimensions of an extended thing (a woman’s physical features).

In this essay Kant concludes that: “In matrimonial life the united pair should, as it were, **constitute a single moral person, which is animated and governed by the understanding of the man and the taste of the wife.**”<sup>62</sup> Not only is the individual woman or man fragmented, but their relation also loses its ontological differentiation as two separate persons. The rejection of *Hylomorphism* ends for the pre-critical Kant with no real concept of man, no real concept of woman, and no real understanding of the ontological foundation for interpersonal relations. He offers a weak fractional complementarity within an embedded traditional gender polarity, i.e., there are philosophically significant differences between the genders, and the man is by nature superior to the woman.

After Kant’s turn to critical and transcendental philosophy in 1770-1771, he seems, at first glance, to have begun a new approach of gender neutrality, in that he usually ignores gender differences between men and women. This may suggest to some that Kant understood men and women to be equally capable of exercising their reason. This approach is found especially in his 1781 and 1787 versions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in his 1783 *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, and in his 1788 *Critique of Practical Reason*.

Lewis White Beck described Kant’s context in his introduction to *Lectures on Ethics* (1775-1780): “[W]e have in these manuscripts a substantially accurate transcription of Kant’s lectures on ethics as he gave them in the years 1775-1780, and probably in the form they took in

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.



the later part of this period.<sup>63</sup> In the *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant describes woman's human nature as subordinated and actually sacrificed to her sexual identity:

The desire which a man has for a woman is not directed towards her because she is a human being, but because she is a woman; **that she is a human being is of no concern to the man; only her sex is the object of his desires.** Human nature is thus subordinated. Hence it comes that all men and women do their best to make not their human nature but their sex more alluring and direct their activities and lusts entirely towards sex. **Human nature is thereby sacrificed to sex.**<sup>64</sup>

In 1784, Kant introduced the notion of “**Enlightenment**” as the **courage to use one's own reason**, and to overthrow the inability to make use of one's understanding without direction from another person. Next, Kant separates women's and men's ways of knowing when, after arguing that laziness and cowardice are the two characteristics that keep people from seeking enlightenment, he observes: “That the step to competence is held to be **very dangerous** by the far greater portion of mankind (and **by the entire fair sex**)—quite apart from its being arduous—is seen to by those guardians who have so kindly assumed superintendence over them.”<sup>65</sup>

Two disciples have particular relevance for the application of Kant's philosophy to the concept of woman. Both reveal a serious limitation of Kant's philosophy at the same time as they seek to elevate woman's position within it. The first disciple of note is Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel (1741-1796), resident of Königsberg and anonymous author of *Über die Ehe* (1774, 1775,

<sup>63</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield and Forward by Lewis White Beck (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), x. “In the modern sense of the word, Immanuel Kant was the first great professor of philosophy. His entire professional life was spent as a lecturer and professor in the University of Königsberg, Students came from all Germany to attend his lectures. Several series of his lectures were taken down stenographically or almost stenographically by his students, and we have his own copious notes for others. We can, therefore, read what Kant said to his own students...”, x.

<sup>64</sup> Kant, “Duties towards the Body in Respect of Sexual Impulse,” in *Lectures on Ethics*, 164. He also argued against adultery, incest, homosexuality, and sodomy on the same moral basis, see 169-179. My emphasis.

<sup>65</sup> Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1978), 85-92, here 85.



and 1792), translated into English as *On Marriage* (1994)<sup>66</sup> and of the two hundred page book, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber*, (1792) translated into English (1979) as *On Improving the Status of Women*.<sup>67</sup> For the purposes of our study, von Hippel's writings about women's identity mark a distinct contrast with his mentor: von Hippel emphasized women's equal capacities with men for reasoning, political activity, and governing. In one exception, however, Hippel argued with Kant that in marriage the man and woman become **one person**.

The second disciple of Kant was Maria von Herbert, who in 1791 and the age of twenty-two, wrote her first letter to Kant, who was then aged 67.<sup>68</sup> She told him that she "had read the metaphysic of morals, and the categorical imperative, and it doesn't help a bit. My reason abandons me just when I need it."<sup>69</sup> Her main preoccupation was whether or not to commit suicide because in following Kant's philosophy, which claimed that one ought never to lie, she had told the truth about herself to a man she loved,<sup>70</sup> with the consequence that he withdrew his love for her.

## **Postmodern Deconstructions of Metaphysics and Woman's Identity**

### ***Nietzsche 'Axes' the Metaphysical Need***

**Frederick Nietzsche's (1844-1900)** 'transvaluation of all values' rejected a metaphysics of substantial form, redefined the meanings of 'true' and 'good' by asserting the supreme value of the will to power. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche reflected on a previous passage he had written:

<sup>66</sup> Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, *On Marriage* trans. Timothy F. Sellner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994).

<sup>67</sup> Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, *On Improving the Status of Women*, trans. Timothy F. Sellner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979).

<sup>68</sup> Langton, "Duty and Desolation," 484.

<sup>69</sup> Langton, "Duty and Desolation," here 482, note 3, quoting August 1791 letter to Kant from Maria von Herbert, extracted from Zweig, trans and ed, *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence*, 175.

<sup>70</sup> Namely that she was not a virgin. See Mahon, "Kant and Maria von Herbert," 441-442 and Langton, "Duty and Desolation," 503-504.

"The moral man is no closer to the intelligible world than the physical man—for **there is no intelligible world...**" This proposition, grown hard and sharp under the hammer blow of historical insight ([read: *revaluation of all values*]), may perhaps one day, in some future—1890!—**serve as the ax swung against the 'metaphysical need' of mankind**—but whether that will be more of a blessing or a curse for mankind, who could say?<sup>71</sup>

Nietzsche's unresolvable tensions about women and woman will be summarized.

#### **Nietzsche's Four Unresolvable Tensions about Women**

- 1) Between viewing women of the *status quo* as weak and prone to slave morality, and women of the *status quo* as strong through their natural relation to Dionysian energy;
- 2) Between two kinds of mothering: male 'spiritual pregnancy and birthing' and female biological pregnancy and birthing;
- 3) Between his personal attraction to women of intellect and culture and his simultaneous fear that education and emancipation will destroy women's instincts; and
- 4) Through his belief that creativity is engendered primarily through conflict of opposites, and that men and women are in a state of perpetual strife with only intervening moments of reconciliation.

#### **Heidegger's 'End' of Metaphysics**

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) characterizes Nietzsche's philosophy as 'the end of metaphysics:'

✓/ But then what does it mean, "**the end of metaphysics**"? It means the historical **moment in which the essential possibilities of metaphysics are exhausted**. The last of these possibilities must be that form of metaphysics in which its essence is reversed. Such a reversal is performed not only in actuality, but also *consciously*—although in different ways—in Hegel's and in Nietzsche's metaphysics. In view of the subjectivity, the *conscious* act of reversal is the only one that is *real*; that is, appropriate to subjectivity. Hegel himself says that to think in the manner of his system means to attempt to stand—and walk—on one's head. And Nietzsche very early describes his philosophy as the reversal of "Platonism."<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1969), here in *Ecce Homo*, "Human, All-Too-Human," #6, 288. Bold my emphasis.

<sup>72</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The End of Metaphysics" in *Nietzsche: Nihilism*, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), vol. 4, 148. His emphasis. Heidegger also states: "Nietzsche's metaphysics, and with it the

Since Heidegger wanted to return philosophy to its earliest western moments, and to reject the Socratic and Platonic turn towards making distinctions dependent upon separating accidental from essential characteristics of different kinds of entities, it was impossible for him to focus on the concept of woman, in distinction from the concept of man. Woman simply remained buried Being itself, or as a simple non-gendered existent, called *Dasein*.

Stanley Grenz observes that: "Heidegger seems to step farther than even Nietzsche dared to tread. He asserts that we do not so much create language as move within it.... As we enter into this kind of genuine experience with language, Heidegger believes, we will be transformed."<sup>73</sup> In spite of the limitations of Heidegger's unisex approach to the concept of woman, his methodology and penetrating questions do help our subsequent analysis of the concept of woman, because they show us one way to come to know the culturally wounded understanding of woman as well as of man:

...reflection on the sphere in which particular beings are revealed—which is for modern philosophy **the sphere of subjectivity—is on the side of the torn condition—the torn consciousness**. Through the rift, torn consciousness is open to admit the Absolute. This holds true for thinking:... **The torn condition keeps the way open into metaphysics.**<sup>74</sup>

### *Derrida's 'Phantom' Metaphysics as 'Nontrue Metaphor'*

Jacques Derrida (1929- ) argues that "...the philosophical text is within metaphor. And the latter can no longer receive its name from metaphysics, except by a catachresis, if you will, that would retrace metaphor through its philosophical phantom: as "nontrue metaphor."<sup>75</sup>

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essential ground of 'classical nihilism,' may now be more clearly delineated as a *metaphysics of the absolute subjectivity of will to power.*", 146. Italics his emphasis, bold my emphasis.

<sup>73</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 107.

<sup>74</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, lecture ix, 89-90.

<sup>75</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 258.

✓ Extending Nietzsche's cryptic question: What if truth is a woman?, and his comment that truth is all surface for woman, Jacques Derrida concludes that the '**woman' truth is only a quality of surface, of writing, and of text rather than of an ontological reality behind the text.**

### ***Cixous Deconstructs Metaphysics into 'Body Writing'***

**Hélène Cixous (1937-)**, in a unique grammatical style, applies a postmodern deconstructivist approach to gender identity: "**Form**, convex, step, advance, seed, progress. **Matter**, concave, ground—which supports the step, receptacle. Man/woman. Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it transports us, in all of its forms, whenever a discourse is organized."<sup>76</sup> Cixous erroneously locks *hylomorphism* into an essential dualism, overturns the distinction between matter and form, and displaces it within her framework of engendered identification. Following her mentor Nietzsche, Cixous writes: "Thinkers, artists, those who create new values, 'philosophers' in the mad Nietzschean manner, **inventors and wreckers of concepts and forms**, those who change life cannot help but be stirred by anomalies—complementary or contradictory."<sup>77</sup>

Basically, in Cixous's deconstructionist philosophy the concepts of woman and of gender become so detached from their real human forms, that they can be made into anything the subject wants "to write" them to be. In her own words: "I take books, **I leave the real...**"; "I will say: today, writing is woman's"; "**Woman must write her body...**"; and "Write yourself: your body

<sup>76</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 63. See also, "Where is She?", from *La Jeune née [The newly born woman]* in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 90. Bold my emphasis.

<sup>77</sup> Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, 'Sorties,' 84. For a comparison of Cixous and Heidegger on the relation of woman to language see Amy Morgan, "Journeys in the Neighborhood of Heidegger and Cixous," *Ellipsis*, (Binghamton, NY SUNY Philosophy Department), vol. 1 no. 1 (spring 1990): 1-35. Bold my emphasis

must make itself heard.”<sup>78</sup> Cixous writes her body in the reductionist language of sexual pleasure. Cixous’s rejection of the real world and of any metaphysical foundation for woman’s form/matter composite identity leads her to seek her identity in satisfying recurring pleasures of the body through a volunteristic hedonism. The postmodern woman disintegrates indeed until she becomes a bundle of unconnected sensations of pleasure and/or pain.

At the end of this phase of deconstruction of metaphysics, of form, of sex, and of gender, the human person also becomes deconstructed. As Foucault so poetically expressed it, “As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man [or woman] is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.”<sup>79</sup> Foucault is part of the deconstructive force, or the sea-tide that has swept away the intellectual foundations that would defend reality for others. Foucault cryptically concludes that: “if some event...were to cause them to crumble... then one can certainly wager that man [and woman] would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, ‘Sorties,’ 72, 84, and 97. My emphasis.

<sup>79</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 387.

<sup>80</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 387.

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